

**Testimony of Gina Walkington
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Eleven years ago, as an underinsured college student, I learned the power of getting high-quality, affordable reproductive health care - care that should be available and accessible to every woman, man, and young person.

In 2006, at my best friend's suggestion, we made an appointment at Planned Parenthood for an exam. We chose Planned Parenthood for a few reasons. First, being college students, money was tight. Second, though I was insured through my parents, the topic of sexual and reproductive health was not one that we shared the same opinions on, and were frankly not topics of open conversation. The sliding scale and privacy that Planned Parenthood provides was essential to me as a 20 year old woman. Knowing many friends and classmates had gone to Planned Parenthood for these same services during high school and college, we knew we could count on Planned Parenthood to provide a supportive, educational environment. Plus it was convenient, which as a college student was very helpful.

We were able to be seen very quickly. I got a Pap test, STI testing, and a supply of birth control. I left feeling confident that I was making smart health choices.

A week later, a clinician from Planned Parenthood called me to explain that the results of my Pap test came back abnormal. I had precancerous cells on my cervix. I was stunned. For a 20 year old woman in college, that is a scary thing to hear. So many things run through your head when you hear the words, "precancerous cells". In addition to other fears, I learned that precancerous cells could prohibit me from having children. At that time in life, having children wasn't something I was even sure I wanted, but the thought of that ability being in jeopardy suddenly made it very precious to me. On top of that, I didn't have great insurance and wasn't sure what kind of care I could access.

The clinician at Planned Parenthood walked me through what I should do next, and helped me figure out how to move quickly so that the cells didn't spread and turn into a larger problem.

I quickly had a LEEP procedure done to remove the precancerous cells. It was a successful procedure that allowed me to get back to being a healthy 20 year old, but it wasn't something I would have been aware of without the Planned Parenthood clinician laying out my next steps.

Had Planned Parenthood not been so easily accessible and affordable for me, my life may have turned out radically different. Had I waited to get care, and had the cells continued to develop without my knowledge, I could have lost the ability to have children or even died.

I am not the only person whose life has been saved by Planned Parenthood. Planned Parenthood provides cancer screenings to more than 650,000 people each year. Nearly 72,000

people had their early stage cancer or abnormalities detected at Planned Parenthood in 2014 alone.

I joined with four of those women to start the Cancer Survivors Network for Planned Parenthood, to bring attention to how essential Planned Parenthood is for making cancer screenings accessible and affordable.

Through the network, I've met a woman from a rural northern New York who couldn't get an appointment to check out the lump in her breast for three weeks - but when she called Planned Parenthood they got her in that day. I met a woman from South Carolina who was just 19 when a Planned Parenthood clinician found a football-sized tumor on her ovary.

We are just a few of the thousands and thousands of women whose lives have been saved by Planned Parenthood.

It has been suggested that those people who rely on Planned Parenthood could instead receive care from a federally funded community health center. In House Speaker Paul Ryan's district, where I live, there are two Planned Parenthood health centers, and two federally qualified community health centers that provide screenings and birth control options. The community health centers, including county health departments in the area have said publicly they would not be able to accommodate the patient load from Planned Parenthood, as many of those patients are referred by them to Planned Parenthood because they are already overwhelmed.

For my situation and so many others, if I had needed to wait several weeks, I wouldn't have been able to go to my Planned Parenthood health center while at home on a college break. It likely would have meant I would go without any sort of treatment because it wouldn't have been readily available.

Planned Parenthood operates 22 locations in 15 Wisconsin counties, with just two providing abortion services. A survey by Health Management Associates found that in seven of those counties there are no viable alternatives to Planned Parenthood for family planning services. Two counties that would have no alternative if Planned Parenthood were to close – Racine and Walworth – are in Speaker Ryan's district.

From my own experience, I know that health care needs to be readily available so that a young woman in college can get lifesaving screenings like I did. I know that if screenings like this are not readily, quickly available and affordable, young women will go without.

In Speaker Ryan's own district, 49,600 people are projected to lose coverage if the American Health Care Act (AHCA) passes. Of that total, 18,800 will lose their employer provided health care. In addition, 6,300 children, and 1,500 people with disabilities who rely on Medicaid are at risk of losing coverage.

Today, I am fortunate to be covered under my husband's union-provided health insurance. However, if we were to lose that coverage, and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) were to have been repealed, it is likely that I, as well as at least one of my children would be denied coverage, or charged sky-high premiums due to pre-existing conditions.

My closest friends and family would also face devastating consequences without the protections that the ACA provides. My parents are farmers in Iowa, and they purchase insurance privately. With age comes the inevitable medical issues, and while I am very fortunate that they are both still relatively healthy, they both have had medical issues that would qualify as preexisting conditions, and would dramatically increase the price and availability of insurance coverage.

My mother and father-in-law rely on Medicaid. As residents of Wisconsin's 1st Congressional District, it's possible that they may be two of the 2,200 elderly residents who lose Medicaid coverage under Speaker Ryan's bill.

My best friend, who was with me on that first visit to Planned Parenthood, was diagnosed as a Type 1 Diabetic at the age of fifteen. After he finished school, he also stopped being covered by his parents' insurance. As an independent business owner, he did not have access to employer-provided insurance benefits. Because insurance companies were allowed to deny him coverage based on his pre-existing condition, they did — all of them did. This left my friend to foot an out-of-pocket expense of between \$1,200-\$1,500 a month for his life-sustaining insulin. Today, because of the laws put in place through the ACA, he can't be denied coverage. If this law is repealed, it will, in no uncertain terms, mean my friend and those like him will face a life or death struggle to find the financial resources necessary to support the ever increasing costs of the medication needed for him to stay alive. This is a very, very real-life consequence of the decisions being put in front of our elected officials. It isn't hypothetical.

I know I am not the only woman in this state who can say they owe their lives and their families to the care Planned Parenthood provides and to the protections put in place by the ACA. The stories of my friends, family and neighbors are not unique to them. It is irresponsible and unacceptable that Speaker Ryan would try so hard to take away access to Planned Parenthood, Medicaid, and the essential health benefits currently protected under the ACA, for the women and families who need it.

When I think of Planned Parenthood, I think of my three boys, who I'm thankful to have because of the care I received. I'm here today because 11 years ago Planned Parenthood was there for me. I stand with them, and the people representing us should too.